

Archive of the Matrimonial Court of Săliște. Sources for the History of Women in Modern Transylvania

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Abstract. Very little is known about the family life of Transylvanian women in the modern era. The main explanation is related to the insufficient exploitation of sources. Due to the richness, variety and complexity of the judicial-ecclesiastical archives, we have started building a database on divorce in *Airtable* based on records from the Săliște, the main village of Mărginimea Sibiului, which has a unique, well-preserved documentary heritage. The ecclesiastical archive is kept at the Museum of the Orthodox Deanery of Săliște in good condition, undamaged. Although the dissolution of marriage was a marginal phenomenon, the time has come to open the discussion for a debate on the sources and to take some steps forward in this research avenue. The article provides a description of the most important documents related to divorce, with a focus on content, structure, form, style, classification. The advantages but also the limits of matrimonial files are presented, which place the analysis scheme on the border between family history, historical demography, history of law, history of women, history of the church, rural history, history of feelings. The quality of the sources gives us the opportunity to identify divorce patterns characteristic of a highly individualized region within the Transylvanian area.

Keywords: divorce, women's history, matrimonial files, Orthodox Church, Transylvania.

1. Introduction

Matrimonial files have not yet been the subject of a large-scale scientific investigation in Romania. There are several explanations for this. Statistics indicate that the phenomenon of divorce was marginal. Fewer than 1% of the Transylvanian population concluded a divorce according to the censuses of 1890, 1900 and 1910 (Bolovan & Bolovan 2010: 111).

The only form of marriage that existed in Transylvania until the introduction of the “political-ecclesiastical laws”¹ (1894/1895) was religious. Moral perceptions guided the lives of communities in traditional societies such as the Romanian one. As the protector of the family, the church always called for reconciliation according to the biblical principle of “*What God has joined together, let no man separate!*” The far-reaching influence of the church (Orthodox and Greek-Catholic for Transylvanian Romanians) was behind the extremely low divorce rates within this group. Added to this was the long and difficult canonical procedure for dissolving marriage and the prohibitively high procedural fees thus incurred, which could reach up to the equivalent of a teacher's annual income (Deteşan 2020: 369).

Another difficulty is related to the fact that an archival index of sources on divorce has not yet been made. There are uninventoried funds, which makes them inaccessible to research. Dispersed throughout Transylvania in state or church archives, matrimonial files must be followed sequentially and correlated with other categories of sources (family records, marriage contracts, dowry contracts, inheritance files, wills, wealth inventories, general reports on the state/movement of the population, etc.) in order to recompose individual biographies and the day-to-day history of couples.

Many of the files have been preserved in incomplete form. Most often the information and data were recorded unevenly and cannot be compared across time and space. The number of documents included in a file varies from case to case, year to year and from deanery to deanery. Although the research of the ecclesiastical archives has made obvious progress in Romania in recent decades in the direction of documentary valorisation, and from an interpretative point of view, their “stripping” has remained limited and deficient.

The processing and editing of divorce-related documents, with all the stages involved-transcription, translation, collation, regestation, the preparation of critical notes, and the establishment of onomastic and toponymic indices - remains an intensive, challenging, and meticulous task. This undertaking requires, above all, proficiency in the languages of the 19th-century sources: Hungarian, German, and Romanian written in Cyrillic script.

The information and data in matrimonial files are different from sources that provide continuous registration, such as population censuses or civil status

¹These are the civil matrimonial legislation (article of law XXXI on civil marriage, XXXII on the religion of children from mixed marriages and XXXIII on civil registration registers) or the so-called “political-ecclesiastical laws”, by which the institution of civil marriage and state registration registers were introduced in Transylvania on October 1, 1895. See Bolovan et al., 2009: 864-903.

registers. On the one hand, we get the classic demographic indicators: age at marriage, age at divorce, year of marriage, year of divorce, religion, nationality, place of origin, place of residence, number of children, occupation. What differs from the Western context is the ecclesiastical nature of the formation and dissolution of marriage. In reading the documents we find a diversity of names associated with divorce². In addition, there are details recorded on spouses' education, the dowry received at marriage, moral behavior³, geographical mobility, family structure, and household formation. On the other hand, we can better understand the mechanisms of divorce and the factors that affected the dissolution of the marriage. „The cause of bad living” can be explained by several determinants: early marriages, arranged marriages, socio-cultural differences between partners (ethnic and/or religious differences, unequal level of education), lack of economic resources, material difficulties, financial risks, unstable macroeconomic situation, poor health, specific local circumstances.

This study presents the most important sources on divorce preserved in the juridical-ecclesiastical archives of Transylvania, covering topics related to the origin and function of the documents, and to their content, structure and typology. In addition, aspects less often addressed in historiography regarding the form and style of documents were taken into account. The advantages and limitations of matrimonial files will be pointed out, which place the analysis scheme on the border among family history, historical demography, history of law, history of women, history of the church, rural history, history of feelings. The main objective is to examine the content and significance of the records of divorce proceedings. Any attempt to explain confrontations in front of the courts relates to women's experiences and lives, which can only lead to a better understanding of women's history. The quality of the sources allows us to identify divorce patterns and characteristics typical of a strongly individualized region within the Transylvanian area.

² *Marital divorce process, divorce process, divorce case/action, total separation, total divorce, dissolution of marriage forever, separation process, matrimonial process.*

³ The morality of the inhabitants is attested by an „unofficial certificate”. For example, the Galeş commune town hall issued a document authenticated by signature by the Orthodox priest Dimitrie Iosof, which specified: „during his husband's absence from home to his economy [Ioana lui Iacob Răchițan from Galeş, married to Simion Bratu from Tilișca] he advanced in a very demoralized behavior in several branches of moral corruption, without having been shy of the reprimands of one and the other”. See the Archive of the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Săliște (hereinafter A.P.O.R.S.) 131/1873.

2. The region and population studied

Mărginimea Sibiului is a compact Romanian Orthodox area that has gained undeniable fame through the occupations of its inhabitants. Transhumant shepherding, processing of sheep flock products and transit trade were the predominant productive activities, which provided the inhabitants with satisfactory incomes and a high standard of living. From an administrative point of view, the area belonged to the county of Sibiu (covering an area of 1,200 km²), and from an ecclesiastical point of view to the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Săliște. In terms of size and population, Săliște was one of the small but wealthy deaneries of the Archdiocese of Transylvania. The total population of 24,660 was 11,737 men and 12,447 women (in 1872). In the famous shepherds' villages of Mărginime (Săliște, Gura Râului, Jina, Poiana, Tilișca, Rășinari) there were 15 churches built of solid material, covered with tiles, served by 27 priests, 3 parish administrators and 1 deacon. (A.P.O.R.S. 61/1872).

Located in the Black River Valley, at the border between the Cibin Mountains and the Transylvanian Plateau, Săliște was a district centre (*centru de plasă*) and the seat of a deanery. It offered a model of organization and development. The jurisdiction of the church of Săliște had in 1883 a population of 4,226 inhabitants (1,370 families, of which 2,226 women and 2,000 men) divided into four parishes where Daniel Marcu (parish priest), Onisifor Borcea (parish priest), Ioan Popa (chaplain) and Alexandru Borcea (chaplain) served. (A.P.O.R.S. 3/1884). The community had a complex social-occupational structure, including individuals who worked as doctors (Dr. Nicolae Calefariu, Dr. Nicolae Comșa), public notaries (Nicolae Hențiu, Ioan Chirca, Octavian Sglimbea), a bank manager (Constantin Herța), a lawyer (Dr. Nicolae Petra), an accountant (Nicolae Hociotă), a judge (Ioan Maxim), a pharmacist (Dumitru Banciu), a vice-prefect (Petru Drăghici), an inn owner (Dumitru Răcuciu), a painter (Picu Procopie Pătruț), merchants (Petru Comșa, Ionel Comșa, Ioan Banciu, Iordache Roșca Căpitan, Nicolae țintea, Teodor Doboiu, Ioan Bârsan, etc.). The village witnessed the opening of the first practical school of economics, the first graft garden, the first dairy in the area. The Great Square paved with boulders and was about three times larger than the square of the capital of Oltenia. Every Monday was a market day. At the Central Hotel in the Square, there was a restaurant run by Ilie Popa (Stoenescu 1905: 474-475). The Great Square brought together 30 Romanian vaulting companies that began to expand to Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Târgu-Jiu, Cluj or Bistrița. In Săliște and four surrounding communes alone, there were 100 such merchants and tenants (Tribuna 1906: 6).

The capital of Mărginimea had enough resources to support several cultural institutions. The most important, the central school - confessional Orthodox capital⁴, boasted qualified teachers speaking German and Hungarian and a high school attendance. Solidarity, respect for the elderly and the poor, as well as a strong associative spirit were all evidence of social conscience. A cluster of associations and corporations demonstrated a vibrant and extensive social life.⁵ The literacy level of the population was high. Only 18% of all adults did not know how to read and write (A.P.O.R.S. II/21/1911). Also, one could find a sewing machine in every fifth house, with three quarters of the local women earning their living by tailoring, sewing and weaving. This „republic of Romanian peasants” (Nicolae Iorga) produced 11 academicians, a unique fact in the world compared to such a small community.

3. Sources

Săliște has a unique, well-preserved documentary heritage. The archive is kept at the Museum of the Deanery of Săliște, in a building that is over 100 years old. The documents are in very good condition, undamaged. They were inventoried according to the chronological principle. The limit years of the fund are 1848 and 1937. A series of complete, systematic and continuous documents, stretched over almost a century, have been preserved in good condition, which is a great advantage to historical research.

The collection is variously represented in its approximately 15 linear meters. The sources are unique. In terms of content, it provides information related to the church, school, population, administration, social and cultural life. The archive includes documents written in Romanian (97%), German (2%) and Hungarian (1%). Until 1864/1865 the Romanian documents were written in the Cyrillic alphabet (Deteșan 2016: 283).

From the typological point of view, we can find official correspondence and private letters. From the point of view of content, the ecclesiastical documents predominate (church statistics and circulars, protocols, reports, notes and dispatches) followed by school documents

⁴At the school in Săliște, 7 teachers and 1 teacher aged between 24 and 53 taught over 500 children. Teachers received a yearly wage between 350 and 400 florins. See A.P.O.R.S. 349/1884.

⁵The „Casina Română” Reading Society (1878), the Firemen's Meeting (1882), the Craftsmen's Meeting (1882), the Music and Songs Reunion (1883), the „Casa de Păstrare” / „Keeping House” Joint Stock Company (1884), the Beauty Meeting, the Reunion of the Studious Youth (1890), the Săliște District of Astra (1894), the Funeral Meeting (1901), the „Binefacerea” Asylum for the Care of the Sick and the Protection of the Helpless (1906), the „Poporul” Bank (1908), the Romanian Orthodox Women's Society of Săliște (1914), The Romanian Orthodox Youth Society of Săliște (1916).

(teachers' employment contracts, certificates, certificates, contracts, reports after-school absences, annual reports on the state of schools), demographic resources (matrimonial files, annual lists of marriages performed, statistics of legitimate and illegitimate births, records of population migration), photographs, excerpts from articles from the press of the time or leaflets. All of them attest to complex historical realities and provide a glimpse into individuals' lives (villagers, priests, archpriests) and levels of communities (villages, parishes, deanery), within the Mărginimea Sibiului area.

The sources on divorce used for demographic analyses are matrimonial files. Renowned Romanian historians, such as Simion Retegan, Sorina Paula Bolovan and Ioan Bolovan, Valeria Soroștineanu, Mircea Brie, understood the importance of matrimonial files and used them in their analysis to explore the „causes” judged at the level of the Greek-Catholic Diocese of Gherla, the Matrimonial Court of Sibiu or the Greek-Catholic Diocese of Oradea.

The matrimonial files were created and kept by the church institutions where the divorce occurred. At the end of the nineteenth century, every year, the archpriest drew up a general report of the deanery. In the chapter on „Population Status/Movement” we can read about the number of inhabitants, the number of families, literacy rates, the number of births, marriages, divorces, deaths and changes of religion which occurred in the communes.

In Săliște, the protopresbyterial seat (the first court) that judged matrimonial disputes met on a monthly basis. It had the obligation to send to the consistory the records of couples faced with „the cause of bad living”. All documentation had to be kept in the archive.

The delay of Romanian historiography in utilizing this type of sources, compared to English, French, or German productions, can be remedied by creating databases. For the southern area of Transylvania, we have started the creation of a database for the Săliște deanery. The representativeness of these files at the provincial level is yet to be established, and the research into other regions is to be extended. In addition, the evolution of divorce among Romanians, Hungarians and Saxons should be compared.

The selected documents were digitized (a total of about 14,800 images). The divorce database includes 528 files judged at the level of the Săliște Orthodox deanery between 1860 and 1890. After going through all the files and transcribing them partially, we introduced the data manually in the Airtable interface. Almost half of the cases – 223 or 42.2% - ended in a total divorce sentence. The remaining share comprised matrimonial disagreements 114 (21.5%), unresolved files 54 (10.2%), incomplete files 49 (9.2%), files in which

the reconciliation of partners was successful 40 (7.5%), files rejected by the court 29 (5.4%), “bed and board separations” 19 (3.5%) (Deteşan 2020: 370).

The documents in the divorce files record important events in the course of life: birth, marriage, divorce, remarriage. Birth and marriage information⁶ is derived from civil status registers. The date of birth, the name and surname, the religion, the names of the godparents, the names of the parents (sometimes also the father's occupation), the place of birth, the name of the priest who officiated the baptism, the date of marriage, the age at marriage, the marital status, the number of announcements and the date on which they were made, the godparents, the priest who celebrated the marriage were recorded.

Female voices were heard more frequently at the Sălişte courthouse. Women filed for divorce more often (61%) than men (37%), as was the case in France and the Netherlands (van der Heijden, 2015); in 2% of cases, divorce was granted by mutual consent of the spouses. 68% of the divorced couples had one or more children, and 32% had no children (Deteşan 2020: 371).

The more frequent initiative of women in divorce affairs can be explained by the fact that they managed to gain some financial autonomy, and thus more easily escaped the tutelage of men. At the end of the nineteenth century, over 20 shops and numerous folk costumes workshops led by women were operating in Sălişte. Ana Bucşe ran a colonial shop (groceries, tea, coffee, spices, chocolate, tobacco), Sora Beju owned a small goods shop, Ermina Irhaş, the mother of Archpriest Dumitru Borcea, ran a carpet weaving workshop and initiated and trained generations of young weavers. Wives and husbands viewed the breakdown of marriage from different perspectives and attributed different causes to it. The lives of women, lived within the family, were exposed before an all-male jury. The documentation produced by the women - statements, actions requesting the opening of the divorce process, answers, replies, replies to replies (*rejoinder, triple, quadruple, quintuple*) – proves, once again, the active role and contribution they made in building their own destiny.

Divorce files were centralised at the level of each deanery (court of law), and the ecclesiastical authorities had the task of preserving them. This category of sources is thus well suited for both a qualitative, as well as a quantitative analysis.

⁶ Divorce files contain birth and marriage extracts stamped and signed by the priest.

The divorce was admitted in the Orthodox Church in Transylvania. There were three ecclesiastical courts: the protopresbyterial seat (the first court), the diocesan consistory (second court) and the metropolitan consistory (third court). From a procedural point of view, the divorce included two stages, namely the investigation and the trial.

4. Content, form and style in matrimonial files

Ecclesiastical justice exercised by qualified clergy acted in stages, with debates and deliberations, according to a well-established canonical procedure. Preliminary to the trial itself, „two attempts at peace were carried out before the priests”.⁷ The priest sought, by all ecclesiastical means, to restore harmony between the spouses. After 15 days, the attempt at reconciliation was repeated in the presence of two distinguished members of the community. In case of failure, the priest issued a certificate with the result of the reconciliation attempts, directing the parties to the archpriest. The archpriest tried to achieve a „reconciliation” and then left a period of 30 days for the preparation of the trial.

From the point of view of the process, the documentation is limited to the documents submitted to the courts: arguments for and against the parties, summonses, setting deadlines, depositions, interrogations and hearings of witnesses, investigations, solutions and sentences.

A selective inventory of the documents in the matrimonial files includes:

a) The plaintiff's action - provides biographical and demographic data: age, sex, place of birth, residence, religion, occupation, date of marriage, duration of marriage, number of children and reason for requesting divorce. The dissolution of the marriage was requested through *the matrimonial action (defendant, action)*. The parties were asked in what form they want the divorce process to take place, protocol or scriptural. Usually, the protocol procedure was chosen. The accusation had to be reported with all the necessary circumstances and evidence: „at first everything was good because the undersigned brought a beautiful fortune as a dowry, but this did not last long because he was not thrifty and did not spare any wealth. He went to Romania to make a fortune, but he became involved with swindlers and thieves, and after two years he sent me a letter informing me that he had taken another wife and if I so wished, I could also marry whomever I wanted.” (A.P.O.R.S. 33/1882)

⁷According to art. 21 of the *Regulation* for the year 1878. See *Regulament, 1878*, 259-292.

- b) The respondent's reply, which denies the accusations made;
- c) Certificates of several types: medical, marriage, for the appearance of the parties at the parish office, poverty (pauperity);
- d) Standard extracts from the register of baptised and/or married couples, investigation protocols, plenipotentiaries;
- e) Opinions - could belong to the matrimonial defender, to the official of the dean's seat who was supposed to provide a brief pertaining to the case (*Ro. Referent*), to the prosecutor of the dean's seat; during the period analysed, the position of marriage defender (*defensor of matrimonial cases*) was held by V. Almășan and Dr. Ioan Nemeș, lawyer in Sibiu; the formulation of the opinion of the matrimonial defender („between the litigants, there is a mutual perplexed hatred, which makes conjugal cohabitation impossible”) held an important place in the economy of the process of divorce.
- f) Hearing and formal oath of witnesses - provides information about witnesses: name, religion, age, marital status, children, criminal record, and relationship with the defendants („Do you have any hatred towards the parties?”). The witnesses were being heard one by one, under oath. The depositions were faithfully recorded, signed by handwritten signature or the laying on of the finger. Two categories of questions were asked: general/standard („Do you know why you are called here? Do you know the litigants? What is your name? Where are you from? What religion are you? Are you married? Do you live in enmity with one of the parties? Are you related to any of the parties? What do you eat? Have you ever been punished or under criminal investigation? Did someone from the parties promise you something, to speak in their favor, or do you have any damage or interest from this process?”) and special inquiries, which related to the controversial case and its circumstances, with a focus on what the witness knew about the two spouses who had filed for divorce. The oath taken by witnesses before the investigative commission and trusted men was prescribed by the matrimonial procedure according to the following standard formula: *I, X, swear to Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that I will tell all that I know, and what I will be asked in this trial, just and true. May God help me* (A.P.O.R.S. 320/1883).
- h) Investigation protocol - includes information about all persons involved in the investigation of the case and their occupation - commissioner, witness, plaintiff and accused;
- h) The judgement or sentencing - was drafted in writing; it was a public decision, communicated to the parties, who could challenge it within 15 days. It had to contain a few elements: a brief presentation of the case, the in-facto statement and the decision made. It established whether the parties could

remarry, the amount of the court costs; it could be appealed. The document, with a registration number, stamped and with an original handwritten signature, had to be countersigned by the episcopal secretary. The reason for divorce had to abide by the canons of the Orthodox Church and be fully proven. The separation could be total or partial (the so-called „separation from bed and board” for a fixed period of one year, to reconcile the spouses). The divorce decrees indicated precisely whether and under what conditions the partners could remarry: „dissolve the marriage by allowing the plaintiff to move on to another marriage, the accusation being withdrawn when the accused proves in a trustworthy manner that he/she has cleansed himself/herself of the disease he/she suffers from [insanity]” (A.P.O.R.S. 178/I/1885). Remarriages were mainly due to the death of one of the partners and not to divorce. Women were the most vulnerable, exhausted from repeated childbirths, subjected to household work, raising and caring for children, and preparing clothing, fabrics and bed linen during the winter. At the end of the divorce sentence, the court costs were specified. Usually, the partner found guilty had to pay a fee in the form of a sum of money ranging from 10 fl. to 120 florins (Deteşan, 2020). When children were involved, the divorce decree specified under whose care they would fall: „at the request of the plaintiff, the care of the three legitimate children is left to the named [Ioan Mutu of Topârcea]”, and that other civil claims would be resolved by the competent civil court (A.P.O.R.S. 178/I/1885).

The matrimonial files were handwritten by several people, in black or blue ink, in different calligraphy (small, italic, straight). They only contain text, and no illustrations, graphs or tables. When the sheets were tied with thread, the thread had to be sealed so that the sheets did not come loose. Each matrimonial file was accompanied by an opis or itemized list of the documents.

The vocabulary includes archaisms, regionalisms, Latinisms, and terms specific to canon law. The text often contains underlined terms and passages as well as annotations. Many abbreviated words need to be supplemented during the transcription. The forms of address comply with the terminology and protocol norms of the Orthodox Church⁸. For authenticity, a stamp⁹, date, holographic signature, stamp or seal are applied. Sometimes the spelling and punctuation are inconsistent. The regime of uppercase or lowercase letters, with reference to the months of the year, the days of the weeks, religious holidays, state and church institutions, differs from the current one. There are

⁸ *Most Honored Archbishop, Venerable Protopresbyterial See, Venerable Archdiocesan Consistory*, etc.

⁹ According to Law XXIII/1868, all divorce proceedings were subject to stamp jurisdiction, i.e. the action, the investigation protocol were stamped with 36 seals/sheet and the certificates with 50 seals/sheet.

also lexical peculiarities, specific to southern Transylvania. The genuine, pure Romanian language is fluent and full of charm, reminiscent of the orality of the proceedings.

The need to draw up a glossary of terms is more than obvious. We encounter Latinising terms¹⁰, as well as formal and stereotyped constructions. Canon law involves a specific mode of expression. The style comprises two registers: official and personal.

5. Conclusions

Although they are not the perfect sources, matrimonial files remain the most important historical sources in Transylvania in terms of the information they provide on the phenomenon of divorce. A systematic approach of the Săliște fund regarding divorce gives us a broader and more in-depth vision of women's lives.

Divorce proceedings have produced a significant number of documents, which come in various forms. They are subject to demographic and family history analyses, but can be analysed in terms of content, form, and style. Divorce papers reveal individuals' level of culture. The vocabulary includes lengthy, explanatory sentences. The style is petitionary.

The divorce casuistry reveals intimate glimpses of the daily existence of the shepherds from Mărginimea, who leave their legal wives and the country to make some fortune. We enter a traditional world where girls just out of childhood become wives after a superficial acquaintance with their future partner.

We have pointed out the very particular impact of religion on the lifestyle of Mărginimea Sibiului. The Church considered divorce as *one of the most shameful wounds of society*. Through the voice of the priests, the church condemned the deplorable moral state of the inhabitants.

The selected case study is a particular one in the Transylvanian area. The pattern of the immovable rural society does not apply to Săliște. *Perla Mărginimii* was a laboratory of changes, of the circulation of goods and good practices. The fact that the inhabitants here were educated was an indicator that underlines the high level of development of the area, compared to other Romanian communities.

¹⁰ *Inci* (accused), *actor* (plaintiff), *ursoriu* (request to the archpriest's seat for resolution without delay), *utripoints* (questions addressed to witnesses about spouses), *defensor matrimonial* (marriage defender) who had the role of defending the marriage with all possible arguments; he was a good connoisseur of the canons; he elaborated his opinion in writing in matrimonial cases after a thorough investigation of the documents of the trial; *pertraction* (debating a disputed issue).

The women of the Săliște deanery seemed to have some economic opportunities and some possibilities to run small local businesses. They were women with judgment, willpower, energy, caution. This was the case of Maria Bârza (divorced) who only through her ability to be economical „can boast that she has the house provided with all the necessities” (A.P.O.R.S. 19/1872). Many women had amassed financial capital to such an extent that they could lend money to men. See the case of Ana Roscoiei from Săliște (divorced) who gave the sum of 320 fl. to Ioan David Ungurul (A.P.O.R.S. 11/1872). In the same group we can include the merchant Ana, born Zaza (divorced), who traded with belts and cotton in Hațeg and other parts of the country. Since she was providing for herself, she fed herself and her child for more than five years, paid all the hard debts and could afford to shoulder all the communal burdens (A.P.O.R.S. 32/1875). At Săcel, Ana of Simion Dicu (divorced) cared for “all the things of the household and the field as required of a good provider of home and field work, paying each worker his due pay and increasing in her economy” (A.P.O.R.S. 11/1872). In Tilișca, Ioana Nanu (divorced) dealt with various trades. She kept her two sons, Nicolae, 11 years old, and Constantin, 9 years old, on her own expense at the Reformed school in Orăștie. She paid for private classes of German and Romanian for her children. The woman had an exemplary behavior, worthy of all the praise that was due to a true mother (A.P.O.R.S. 38/1876).

In historiography, female characters from the upper layer of society are mainly mentioned: mothers, wives or daughters of political leaders, economic, social, religious elites. We know very little about ordinary women and their everyday existence. The matrimonial files kept in Săliște allow us to reconstruct the lives of women and the determinants of the dissolution of marriage.

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